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DENVER DAN

And the Counterfeitors.

By the Author of "Denver Dan and His Mystic Band," "Denver Dan and the Road Agents,"
Etc., Etc., Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BAD BANK NOTE.

"WHAT does all the stuff come to, Ned?"

"Seven dollars and fifty cents."

"All right. Take it out'n that."

"What—a greenback? Well—well, I haven't seen a greenback before since I left the east. It makes me think of old times."

"They're gettin' plenty around hyar now, an' they tell me that even in Californy there's plenty on 'em now. So they is in the cities—in Leadville, even, an' down in Central City, whar they usen't ter take nothin' but silver."

"There's your change, Gil. I'll have to save that twenty-dollar note to make me think of old times."

"All right. You'll see plenty more on 'em afore long, for the gov'ment's sendin' 'em out yer pretty fast."

The scene was the store of Ned Travis, a former dweller in the east, but now living within a few miles of Denver, and running a store which brought him a pretty good income.

He had been in the city itself, but for certain reasons he had moved out a little way after the railroad got to running through, and he claimed to be doing better than before, and every bit of it an honest business, too.

It would hardly have done for Ned Travis to have done anything but an honest business, for his son Jack, a noble young fellow, just turned twenty—the handsomest lad in the whole Rocky Mountain region, he was called—was a member of a band of vigilantes whose name was a terror to evil-doers.

It was not known how many members comprised the band, nor who were its outside agents, nor where it held its meetings, for everything about it was kept perfectly secret.

All that was known, was that one Denver Dan was at its head, but no one had ever seen him to know him, as he always wore a black silk mask over the upper part of his face, and was said to be as cunning as a fox.

He was said to be able to disguise himself in any and every way he saw fit, and in this manner had been able to detect mischief and punish criminals of all descriptions.

It was said that he had even deceived the members of his band themselves, and those who knew him best, by his tricks, and that no one could be sure of knowing him unless summoned to his aid by the sound of his silver whistle, or when assembled in secret council.

Nobody outside of the band knew who was in it, but for the reader's convenience we will state that besides Dan, and his lieutenant, Jack Travis, there was what was known as the inner circle, consisting of Sam Horton, Mike Hollcraft, Joe Darrel, Jerry Dunn, and one or two others; these, with the leader and his lieutenant being what might have been called the executive committee of the organization, in addition to which there were very nearly a hun-

dred other members, all strong, brave, true-hearted men, who had sworn to exterminate all outlaws, and follow Denver Dan to the death.

Since the organization of the band the number of deeds of violence had greatly decreased, and many criminals had found the place too hot for them, and left in haste.

Numerous organized bands of horse-thieves, road-agents, and other desperadoes had been broken up by Denver Dan and his companions, and the law-abiding people of the neighborhood, and indeed for many miles around, owed him a debt of gratitude that they never could repay.*

Ned Travis, the store-keeper, was greatly surprised at one of his customers, Gilbert Derry by name, giving him a twenty-dollar greenback, silver and gold having been used so exclusively for so long a time that the sight of a greenback was indeed a rare occurrence.

Ned showed the note to his customers, and along in the afternoon, when no one was in the place, a tall, handsome-looking man walked in and asked for Mary, Ned's daughter.

"You'll find her inside, Dan, and she'll be glad to see you," answered Ned. "Where have you and my Jack been so long?"

"Hunting down a lot of counterfeitors, or trying to get upon their tracks. Tell ye what, father, if Phil Dorn wasn't in prison I'd be almost willing to swear he was in the gang."

"I've got something to show you, Dan," said Ned, suddenly. "I don't believe you've seen one for many years."

"What is it, father?" Dan, being married to Mary Travis, always calling Ned by that title.

"A twenty-dollar greenback."

"Let me see it."

Ned brought out his treasure and exhibited it to his son-in-law, who looked at it critically.

Denver Dan, some years before, had been cashier in a bank in the east, and consequently was well acquainted with the look of money of all kinds.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, in a few moments.

"Gilbert Derry paid it to me; I gave him change for it."

"Gil Derry?"

"Yes."

"He's a square man enough, and wouldn't do wrong if he knew it."

"What's the matter?" asked Travis, apprehending that something was not altogether right, but not knowing exactly what it was.

"The matter is this. That bill is a cleverly executed counterfeit."

"A counterfeit! That's too bad."

* This story is complete in itself, but an account of the previous adventures of the band, which will be found of rare interest and excitement, can be obtained in Nos. 433 and 436 of the **FIVE CENT WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY**, written by the same author, and entitled: "Denver Dan and his Mystic Band," and "Denver Dan and the Road Agents."

"Never mind, father; it may not be so bad as you think, for by the aid of this bill I intend to follow up the counterfeitors and bring them to justice!"

CHAPTER II.

AN HONEST MAN'S EXPLANATION, AND A STARTLING SURPRISE.

IT was early evening, and a man was sitting by the fire in his two-story, unpainted house smoking a pipe, while his buxom wife was getting supper ready in the kitchen.

The smell of the frying bacon, boiling coffee and fresh bread, just taken from the oven, came through the open door, and Gil Derry, for he it was, smacked his lips with great satisfaction.

"Thet's the kind o' a wife to hev," he muttered between the whiffs; "there ain't no nonsense about her, I kin tell ye. She's jist the kind o' woman fur a rough creeter like me to have."

Three or four small children were tumbling around outside, and their fat, rosy cheeks, sturdy limbs, and clear voices showed that the mountain air agreed with them, and that they had better things to eat than candy or gingerbread.

Suddenly the whole lot came tumbling in at the door, and the oldest one, a boy of about nine years old, said, in frightened tones:

"Golly, dad, ther's a man comin' up the path an' he's got suthin' black on his face, an' a gun, and two or three pistols, an' a knife, an' he looks like he war going tu make a fuss!"

The boy rattled off the whole of this speech at one breath, and as he paused to catch his wind, the doorway was darkened, and the man he had described entered, and sat down.

"Do you know me?" he asked.

"Wull, I reckin' I can give a mighty good guess. If ye ain't Denver Dan, then I'll give it up."

"I am Denver Dan."

"Wull, what d'ye want?"

"What does my presence generally mean, Gil Derry?"

"That some darned coyote hez bin cuttin' up rough, an' thet ye mean fur tu string him up ther fust tree. Ye're death on them fellers, Dan, I'll allow, an' ye deserve credit fur it. I'm glad ter see ye. Will ye hev a bite? Liza's gittin' tea ready, an' she'll fotch it in putty soon."

"You are not alarmed at my coming?"

"No, fur I know ye never harm a honest man, an' if I do say it, there ain't a honest man in the hull state o' Colorayder than Gil Derry."

"So I have always supposed," was the quiet answer.

"D'ye mean tu say that anybody's been sayin' as I wasn't squar' an' fa'r? Kin ye say so yerself?"

"Sit down, Gil," said Dan, quietly. "If I had really thought you were not a square man you'd have been strung up before this. There is a little circumstance that looks bad, but maybe you can explain."

"What's that?"

"You gave Ned Travis a twenty dollar greenback this morning?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get it?"

"I sold Ren Jackson a yoke o' cattle fur a hundred dollars an' a nag ter boot."

"Did you get your money all in bills?"

"Yes, all 'cept twenty dollars in gold, wot I kept, 'cause I promised 'Liza I'd bring her some the next time I went ter town."

"Have you got the other bills with you."

"I hev."

"Would you let me see them?"

"Sartin," and the "honestest man in Colorado" pulled out his old leather wallet, took out the bills and handed them over to Dan, the children looking on in wonder.

Dan gazed carefully at the bills for some minutes, and then handed them back to their owner.

"Gil Derry, you've been done to the tune of sixty dollars," said Dan; "that newish bill is good, but the other two, and the one you gave Ned, are counterfeit."

"Gosh! Is that so?"

"Yes, they are not worth the paper they're printed on."

"By snakes! I didn't think that of Ren Jackson. I knowed he war sharp at a bargain, but I didn't reckin he wur sech a mean cuss as that. By golly, I'll go down to-morrer an' make him gimme back the valley o' them notes. I'll make it good wi' Ned, too, for I wouldn't cheat him out'n a bit's wuth. Durned 'f I thunked Ren Jackson sech a 'tarnal skunk. I'll git it outen him, though, durn me if I don't."

"Stop a bit," said Dan. "Leave the thing to me. I will see that you get your money back all right. Let me manage this business. I've been on the track of a gang of counterfeitors for some time, and this is the first clew I've found."

"Lor'! ye don't tell me so?"

"I can tell bad money when I see it, and I know that somebody is making and circulating spurious coin and notes, right here in the mountains."

"Sho! G'way; I wouldn't a-thought it possible."

"Do you keep dark about this matter, and say nothing of the bad bills or of meeting me, or anything at all about it?"

"I won't open my head to a single critter, trust Gil Derry fur that. Ye're a trump, Dan, an' ef I kin help ye I'll do it. As I said afore, they ain't a honest man 'n me in ther hull state, an' it riles me to think as that goldurned sheep livered cuss played sech a trick onter me."

"He will suffer for it, never fear, if he has anything to do with this gang."

"An' ye won't take a bite?"

"Thank you, no; I have business on hand."

With that the vigilante departed, and in a moment the clatter of his horse's hoofs could be heard upon the rocky path.

"So far so good," muttered Dan to himself as he sped away. "It was as I thought; Gil was taken in by these scoundrels. Now for Ren Jackson, and if he cannot explain this business, up he goes."

Reynolds Jackson, usually called Ren, was a man of a bad reputation, although he had never been detected in any acts which would bring the vengeance of Denver Dan and his band down upon his head.

He was sly and crafty and all that, but his evil deeds were all done under the guise of business, and in a manner that kept him within the pale of law-abiding citizens.

Dan had suspected him for some time, but had not found sufficient evidence to warrant his making any decided movement; but now that he had seen Gil he intended to act with decision.

He had gone about a mile when his horse suddenly stopped short and whinnied as if alarmed at something.

It was quite dark now, but Dan could see some object on the path right under his horse's feet.

He was provided with a dark lantern, and he quickly lit it and flashed the light upon the ground.

The object that had so startled his horse was the dead body of a man.

One glance showed Dan that the man was none other than Ren Jackson.

CHAPTER III.

A DISAGREEMENT AMONG ROGUES.

LET us go back a little and see how the man, suspected of being in league with the counterfeitors, had met with his death.

It was not far from this spot that an hour before the ar-

rival of Denver Dan three men were engaged in an angry altercation.

One of these men was Ren Jackson, and of the others, one was a tall fellow with a black beard and a sinister cast of countenance, while the other was shorter and bore the marks of many a hard fight.

His right ear was missing and part of his left, one side of his face was flatter than the other, and his nose showed signs of having received a bad cut, besides which he had lost two fingers of his right hand and had a scar across his forehead.

"I tell ye what," said this scarred veteran, "they ain't no use in argyin' the p'int. We've got ter hev our own share; that's cordin' ter 'greement."

"D'ye want the yoke o' oxen? That's all I are got," said Ren.

"Ye kin sell 'em ag'in, can't ye?" asked the third man. "What d'ye want of 'em? Sell 'em, an' put all but your share inter the pot. That's what everycne does, an' you've got ter."

"He are sold 'em already," spoke up the man of many scars, "an' hez got ther cash in his clothes now, so he kin jest fork over."

"I'd like ter know ef a feller can't work on his own hook, when he takes all the risk hisself?" protested Ren. "I never says nuffin to you 'uns when yer work yer own games; in course I don't, an' ye ain't got no biz'ness fur ter meddle wi' me."

"The gang works together, I tells ye," said the tall man, "an' what you, or me, or any of us, makes, goes inter the pot, an' at the end o' ev'ry month thar's a dividin'."

"Sartain thar is," said the other, "an' thar ain't nobody kicked ag'in it yit; it's the on'y squar' way ye kin fix it."

"S'pose we leave it to ther gang?" said Ren.

"We're the gang, an' we say put yer boodle in'er ther pot," answered the tall ruffian.

"Fur ter hev you take it out ag'in," said Ren. "D'ye see anythin' green about this yer chap? No sir-ee! I knows what's what, an' I'll leave it to ther gang."

"D'ye mean ter say as we'd steal it?" blustered the tall man.

"I ain't goin' ter give yer ther chance, my buck. Yer ain't over honest, an' I don't care to trust ye with any hard-earned money o' mine; not this mornin'."

"Ye're a mis'able, low-lived, sneakin' pup, Ren Jackson, an' ye ain't fit to live with niggers!"

"Yer lie!"

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Three pistol shots rang out upon the stillness.

"Oh, Lord!"

An agonized shriek followed these words.

Crack!

Crack!

Two more shots followed in rapid succession.

Thud!

A heavy body fell to the earth, while a deep groan was forced from lips that had almost ceased to breathe.

Clatter—clatter—clatter!

The sound of a horse's hoofs, ringing on the rocky roadway as the frightened animal dashes off, is heard, and then the two outlaws spring from their own steeds, and bend over the lifeless form of Ren Jackson.

The tall man draws a keen knife across the pockets of the victim, and abstracts the money therefrom.

He hands half of it to his companion, who stows it away in his own pocket with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Umph! I knew I smelt blood," he muttered. "I kin smell blood furder 'n any man in the Rocky Mountains!"

"That settles him," answered the bearded man. "No-body tells me I lie without gittin' inter a heap o' trouble."

"We'll leave him whar he is," said the other, "an' folks 'll think as how Denver Dan wiped him out."

"Curse the meddlin' pup! Just wait till I meet him alone an' I'll tear the black mask from his face and put a bullet through him! Away with us!"

Even at that moment, the hated Denver Dan was upon their track, and it was well that they made good time, for the bold vigilante was not far behind.

Dan was surprised to find the body of Ren Jackson lying in his path, for dead men tell no tales, and his plan of forcing a confession from the fellow was thwarted.

"I wish the men that killed him had waited a little while longer," he mused, as he rode on. "It must have been some of his own gang that did it, for my boys always leave their mark when they get away with a fellow of his stamp."

"There's no use in crying over spilt milk," he continued, "but it's going to be a harder job than ever to spy out these fellows. I'll hunt 'em down though, if it takes me a month to find the first man, and I'll clean 'em out as sure as I live."

CHAPTER IV.

TONY FLAXMAN'S OPENING—AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

IN front of a large, two-story, frame building, freshly painted, standing on one of the streets of Denver not far from the railroad, hung a sign, bearing the following legend:

THE PARLOR.

T. FLAXMAN, Proprietor.

Step in. Always Open. Best Liquors and Segars.

Within the "Parlor" of Tony Flaxman, or Flaxy, as he was invariably called, the night being stormy outside, was gathered a miscellaneous party of congressman, miners, hunters, tramps, blacklegs, and persons of doubtful reputation.

The "Parlor" was fitted up in gaudy style, the walls being covered with a red paper, on which was a pattern in gilt; the brass lamp brackets were polished till they shone again, the bar and tables were all brand new and shiny, and pictures of famous horses, ballet girls and prize-fighters, all in bright colors, were hung around the room, which was about thirty feet long by twenty wide.

Leading from the large room was a smaller one, which actually had a carpet on the floor, and even more astonishing, a piano, such things being rare in the unsettled west.

It was Flaxy's "opening," the man having just started in the saloon business, being formerly a blacksmith, and the place was crowded; for every new man that came in and paid for a drink was given a second one at the proprietor's expense.

There were the usual number of "waiters," old bums waiting to be treated, and plenty of men ready to treat them, so that Flaxy and his three barkeepers were kept busy.

In one corner, behind the bar, a ponderous German woman, the proprietor's wife, by the way, was up to the eyes in a pile of bread, cold ham, boiled tongue and cheese, which she was rapidly converting into sandwiches for the lunch counter.

Barney Flaxman, her fourteen-year-old, boy, clothed in a white linen jacket, long white apron, and a big napkin over his arm, carried plate after plate of sandwiches to the counter, returning to his mother with other plates, empty, which were to be filled.

Segars, rum, gin, whiskey and some very bad wine were continually called for and delivered, and Flaxy's heart grew joyful as his eyes saw the silver come flowing in, and he promised himself that, if the promise of the "opening day" was only kept up, he would be a rich man in a few years.

"Glad to see ye, gents," he would say, as every fresh party entered. "Walk ride inter de parlor, ye'll always find me to home. Come ride up and take somedings mit me. Thank you, pass the whiskey bottle, alderman, the representative from Arkansaw wants to fill up," and so on, always jolly, always with an eye to business, and never letting a probable customer slip through his hands.

"This is a first-class, genteel house, gents," he says, presently, "an' if anybody vishes a gwiet game of poker or seven up, there's blendy of tables over in de corner there by that green colored lide," referring to the color of the glass globe placed over one of the lamps.

Evidently some of the "gents" had already supposed the place to be respectable, for a game was proceeding at the time Flaxy gave his invitation, the money piled up in front of each man being something startling.

Two of the men seated at the table where the biggest game was going on, were the ones that murdered Ben Jackson; the other two, who were playing against them, deserve description.

One was a young man remarkably handsome and manly in his bearing, about twenty years old, and evidently possessed of great strength; the other was quite old and grey-headed, wore blue glasses and had a very red nose.

"What have ye got?" asked the bearded man of the young fellow, when the betting ceased.

"I've got a sequence flush and don't you forget it," said the boy, throwing down the cards.

"By ——! so you hev. Take in the pot, youngster, it's yourn. I never did see such durned luck in all my life."

The stakes were quite large, and Jack Travis, which was the name of the young man, considered it rather strange that his opponents in the game had not made some objection to his raking in such a large amount.

He had been in places where it was dangerous to try and take away a large pile, and he made up his mind that there was going to be a fight when he threw down his hand.

He was therefore very much disappointed when the men went off without saying a word.

Leaning across the table, he said to his companion, in a voice so low that nobody but him heard it:

"What do you suppose Larry, the Wolf, and Texas Jim are up to, Dan? It's a long time since they've been seen around here."

"They've given me points to-night, Jack," replied the other, who was no less a person than Denver Dan himself, in disguise, "and when I tell you something, you won't be surprised at their not squealing."

"What is it?"

"Those notes, and much of the gold, too, I suspect, are queer."

"Counterfeit?"

"Yes. Larry and Jim are shoving it. I've found out that much, and you and I, if we are sharp, must discover where the stuff is made."

"I might as well chuck the stuff away then."

"No—no, don't do that, save it; we'll want it, by-and-by, to use as evidence; mark the notes plainly so you won't mistake them."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Jack, as he put the money in his pocket.

"Going into Flaxy's best room to look for points; play on his piano, perhaps; give him a surprise party."

"And when will I see you?"

"Can't tell; be on hand, and if you hear the signal, be ready to do some tall shooting, though I'm on a quiet lay just now, and won't make any noise if I can help it. It won't do to frighten the game away."

CHAPTER V.

TRouble in the PARLOR.

"WHAT galoot in this yer crowd kin play the pianer?"

shouted out a rough from the door of the inner room. "If theer's any feller what kin claw iv'ry in ther house, we'll giv him a benefit."

"I used ter play a tune when I wur a young un," said Dan, stepping forward, "but I ain't teched a note fur twenty year."

"Never mind, old two an' six, jest try her onct, an' ef ye kin fetch a tune out'n this yer music box, ye kin hev all the rum ye want ter drink and fifty dollars ter boot."

"Mein goodness," said Flaxy, "off you blays on dot inshتروoment, I lets you shday here all nide."

"Will yer try her a bit, old man?" asked Dakota Pete, the rough already mentioned, of Dan.

"Waal, I'll see what I kin do."

"That's hearty, waltz right in and tech her up."

Dan went into the gaudily appointed room and took his seat at the piano, not a new or first-class instrument by any means, and began running his fingers over the keys.

At the same time he kept a watch upon the men in the room, and noticed several whom he knew to be professional gamblers.

There was one card table in a corner, and Dakota Pete and another man sat down at this, and began playing draw poker, the others sitting or standing around, some smoking and some looking on at the game, while by far the larger portion watched Dan manipulating the keys.

"Don't yer go fur ter spit on this yer carpet an' show yer bad bringin' up," said Pete, "fur it ain't often as a high-toned, knock-me-down carpet like this 'un gets out this way."

"Whar shell a feller spit?" asked one of the spectators.

"Spit in yer hat or in yer pocket, or in ther wood box. Any galoot what spits ain't no gentleman. Gi' us a pipin' hot mug o' spiced rum, Flaxy, old buck, an' set another on ther pianer, so's old blue-glass kin wet his pipes."

The crowd had thinned out somewhat, but as the snow was driving down heavily before a bleak northeast wind, out of doors, the blast being a regular old-fashioned "blizzard," quite a number remained inside, although there were no new additions.

The weather had changed very suddenly, from being warm and pleasant to a howling, roaring gale of snow and wind, and Flaxy was doing a good business, every man desiring to lay in a good supply of liquor before he started out to brave the storm, which none were anxious to do.

The carpet, which has already been mentioned, was a truly gorgeous affair, its like having never been seen west of the Mississippi.

The ground was a staring white, covered with huge bunches of most impossible red and yellow flowers, each one as big as a cabbage, the general effect being that of a fire built on the floor and ready to blaze up to the ceiling at any moment.

The game began, and then Dan, who had once been quite a good musician, although he was out of practice, after striking a few chords, rattled off into the "Old Folks at Home" in a manner that produced instant silence.

From that he danced off without a pause into a lot of old jig tunes, and every man in the room kept time with his feet, the music being infectious.

All this time the game was going on, with varying luck to the players, first Pete being ahead, and then his opponent, and Dan kept his eye upon them constantly.

Presently he started off upon a simple, pathetic ballad tune, such as he had heard when a child, interspersing it with bits of old hymns, weaving them in and out, and returning every now and then to the original melody with the skill of an improvisatore.

Suddenly he saw the man who was playing with Pete shove a card up his sleeve, supposing himself to be unobserved.

More than Dan saw him, however, and before the vigilante could act, Dakota Pete had taken the matter into his own hands.

He had detected the man in the act, and whipping out a huge Bowie knife he jumped to his feet, and before the man could stop him, or know what he was doing, had cut his throat from ear to ear.

The man roiled over upon that gorgeous carpet, and a pool of blood lay right upon the biggest patch of white, utterly ruining it.

The music ceased, and Dan was slipping out of the room when Flaxman entered.

"Mein Gott—mein Gott, who do dot?" he groaned. "Dot carped was ruined, so help mein soul! I shoot me dot man what did dose?"

Pete came forward at that moment, and, while mopping up the blood, said:

"Beg parding, Flaxy, but I'm durned sorry this yer happened. If I'd thought I'd a chucked the cuss outen the window; but no gentleman kin stand cheatin'. But, by gum, ef I'd a thought o' the carpet I wouldn't ha' done it."

Flaxy looked black for a minute, and fingered his revolver nervously, but then returning the weapon to his belt, he said, frankly:

"Mein cracious, Pete, I don't dink you vould! Dot's all righd; we was got to had a reshpectable place, und no cheeting, off we shpoils feefty garbets!"

The gentleman from Arkansaw and the others present coincided with this high-principled opinion, and helped to clean up the blood and throw the dead body out of the window, after which the festivities proceeded, the storm having increased in violence, making it unwise for anyone to go out in it.

"Let's have some more ivory thumpin'," said Pete. "By goll, that 'ere old blue gig-lamps wur no slouch at poundin' the tunes out'n yer music-box. Call him in, an' let's hev some o' that chowder what I smell out yender."

The man was nowhere to be found, but Jack Travis stepped up and offered to play in his stead.

"Gott bless Handsome Shack!" said the honest Dutchman. "Now we was hear somedings what vas somedings."

Jack had learned to play when a boy and living in the east; and, though he had not the fine touch or the skill of Denver Dan, he managed to play a loud, rattling march in a style that elicited great applause.

"Chuck me inter Salt Lake, but that 'ere boy's an artist!" said the man from Arkansaw. "He can't fetch the brine inter a feller's eyes, p'raps, like the old 'un, but I'll be durned if he can't lay clean over him on a hoof-shakin' tune like that."

What had become of Dan in the meantime?

He had quickly thrown off his disguise without being noticed, and drawing a heavy cloak about him and putting on a broad-brimmed slouched hat, started for the door.

Just outside he heard a moan, as if someone were lying in the snow, and quickly adjusting his dark lantern, he flashed the light ahead of him.

Leaning against one of the pillars of the porch was a woman, pale and wan, with only a thin shawl thrown over her shoulders, and a tattered calico dress fluttering in the wind.

"God save us, woman!" said Dan, "come inside; you will perish out here."

"I daren't go in there, sir. I am waiting for my husband."

"Your husband! Why, you are but a child. Who is your husband?"

"Arizona Hank, they call him."

"Then you'd better go home, child, for your husband was caught cheating at cards, and has been killed!"

Dan caught her in his arms, or she would have fallen to the ground.

He quickly carried her into the house, and called for a glass of brandy.

"Poor thing! she looks as if she hadn't had a bite to eat for days," said Dan. "Here, Flaxman, give me some of that chowder," he continued, putting the still unconscious woman in a chair.

"Do you want it for yourself?" asked the Dutchman, ladling out the steaming chowder into a soup plate.

"For myself? No, for this poor woman. Ah! see, she begins to revive. Here, my good creature, take this," and Dan forced her to drink a few drops of brandy.

"Wait a minute, and I'll give you something to eat," he said, as the color returned to the poor creature's cheeks.

He turned to the counter to take the plate of chowder, and saw the proprietor of the "Parlor" just emptying it back into the steamer.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Give me the chowder; I'll pay you for it," and he threw a handful of silver on the counter.

The Dutchman pushed it back, saying:

"Off you vants dot chowder for yourself you could had it for nodings; but I don't sell me dot for no moneys to a womans like dot. Take her ride out of here, dis vas a reshpectable place."

"The woman is perishing with hunger and cold; her husband has been killed, justly, without doubt; but she is suffering, and no man ought to refuse her aid at such a moment."

"I tell you she vas a bad womans. She run away from her husband in Californy—a fine mans, too—und go live mit dot verdamter loafer what vas got hees throat cut. Serve him ride. No, sir, dot womans don'd got nodings in dis place."

Dan turned to the woman, who was trembling like a leaf, and said, softly:

"Is this true?"

"Yes," she whispered, in a frightened sort of way; "but, oh, Heaven! I have suffered for my crime. I knew not what I did. I was young and he was an old man. They made me marry him for his money. I was forced to do it. He neglected me. This man came along. I was blinded, infatuated, and ran away with him; but, oh, Heaven, I have repented my rashness!"

"Poor child!" said Dan, pityingly.

"God knows I would have gone back many a time, but this man prevented me. He abused me, struck me, cursed me, and threatened to take my life, and yet I dared not leave him. Have pity, gentlemen," she continued, gazing around upon the unpitying faces before her.

She met not one kindly glance, and then starting to her feet, moved toward the door, saying, as she tottered a few steps, and then rested against a table:

"God help any of you if you shall ever be in distress, and may He show you more pity than you have shown me!"

"My God! you shall not treat her thus!" said Dan, turning suddenly around, and exposing to the crowd the well-known masked face of Denver Dan.

"You know me!" he cried, drawing a revolver, "and you know also that besides punishing criminals I befriend the helpless and distressed. Give me food for this poor woman, or by Heaven I will call my band and close the place. How long is it since Tony Flaxman thought fit to punish the innocent for the guilty?"

"Mein Gott, Dan, I didn't know dot vas you, so help mein gracious," said the honest Dutchman, handing the renowned vigilante a bowl of steaming soup. "You vas had anydings you ask fur, und if you says de woman's vas a angels I would swear to it."

"I don't say so, but I do say that she has been wronged and is in distress, and as I hope for mercy myself I would not refuse her my aid for all the silver in Colorado. There

CHAPTER VI.

DENVER DAN REVEALS HIMSELF.

At these terrible words uttered by Denver Dan, the poor creature gave a cry of pain and fell senseless.

—there, my good girl,” he added, turning to her and forcing her gently to be seated, “sit down and eat, you must be hungry.”

“I am, Heaven knows, but I cannot eat that which is begrimed me, it would choke me.”

“Now just don’t you mind what I has said,” said Flaxy, leaning over the bar, “so help mine life I was dhrunk when I say dot; eat away, my goot womans; you was welcome. Any friend of Denver Dan’s could have all dey likes in de ‘Parlor,’ so help me Shiminy.”

“Denver Dan?” said the woman, in surprise. “Are you Denver Dan?”

“Yes.”

“The sworn enemy of my husband, and all like him?”

“Yes.”

“And you would befriend such a man’s wife?”

“Ay, that would I, were she worthy of it. I do not punish the innocent.”

“You are a singular being.”

“So I have been told. Are you going, so soon?”

“I must; the way is long, and the road is dark. I must haste before the storm grows worse.”

“Then I will go with you.”

“No—no; you must not.”

“Ay, but I must,” and throwing half of his voluminous cloak around the woman’s slight form, he went out into the howling tempest, banging the door behind him, and leaving the revelers to resume their sport so suddenly interrupted.

Jack Travis had, of course, seen everything that took place, but knowing that Dan would give the signal if he wanted him, continued his playing, paying no attention to his captain.

After Dan had been gone a few minutes, however, the young man heard a low call outside the window, unnoticed by anyone else, and arising from the piano, a few moments afterward, he made some excuse for not playing any more, and went out.

Outside of the house he found Dan waiting for him, the poor unfortunate woman being still in his company.

“Keep your eye on Larry the Wolf, if he leaves the place before morning,” said Dan, “and be in the council room back of the store by daylight, or soon afterward, with Mike, Sam, Joe and the rest of the inner circle. I shall have important news to communicate.”

“You want me to follow up the Wolf?”

“Yes, if necessary. When you go back, take my disguise, you’ll find it there in the corner.”

“All right; I go to follow the trail of the Wolf.”

A few moments after Jack’s departure the remaining occupants of the “Parlor” were astonished at the return of the old man with the blue spectacles, who had given them so much pleasure earlier in the evening.

Dakota Pete at once ordered supper for the old man and set him down at the piano, where Jack played away for dear life, keeping an eye on the Wolf, who was playing a square game for the first time in his life, having the fate of Arizona Hank before his face, and not caring to incur Flaxy’s displeasure by making another bloodstain upon that wonderful carpet.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUNTERFEITERS’ AT WORK.

A ROUGH cabin stands under a beetling cliff in the heart of the mountains, and around a plain pine table in the one room the place boasts, are seated three men.

Two of these are our old acquaintances, Larry the Wolf and Texas Jim, the other being a man who has but just introduced himself to the others as Dandy Jack.

He brought with him a letter of introduction from Arizona Hank, and seemed very much astonished when informed of that gentleman’s death.

“I’ll lay for that coon,” said Larry, referring to the man from Dakota. “I think he runs with Denver Dan’s gang. Anyway he put the United States marshals on my track last winter and I’m most got fetched. I kin smell his blood, I kin, an’ I’ll have it afore I’m much older.”

“Ther’s Sam Horton, too; I’m a-layin’ fur him,” said Jim, “an’ I mean tu go fur him. We’ll make them fellers sick o’ botherin’ us. Waal, Mr. Dandy Jack, they tell me you left old Virginny in somethin’ of a hurry.”

“Yes, you kin bet I did; but I fotched some plates wi’ me, and ef they ain’t the puttiest ye ever see then I’m a-layin’, that’s all. Why, blast it, they’re a durn sight better ‘n the ginniwine. They was made by a feller named Crawford. He was nabbed, but I got away with the plates.”

“Got ‘em with yer?”

“Yes, but I darsen’t show ‘em out here, fur ye might hev visitors.”

“Hum, all our visitors is squar, mostly,” said Larry, “an’ when any cussed marshal comes around we smell his blood so ‘tarnal quick that he don’t have no show at all. Denver Dan can’t find us, an’ you may know that we are got a pretty good hidin’ place.”

“I’ll be bound ye have, and if it hadn’t been fur Hank’s directions I couldn’t a found it at all.”

“Come in an’ see the gang at work,” said Jim. “Larry, you stay here. We’re workin’ off some bully gold fivers and tens that you couldn’t tell from the real stuff, and we’ve got a pile o’ notes that ye’d swear was good.”

“An’ they’re all queer—every one on ‘em?”

“Ahem! but they’re blasted good.”

Jim pushed open a door which no casual observer would have supposed existed, and led the way through a long, narrow passage, evidently hewn out of the solid rock.

After a while he came to another door, which he unlocked, and descended a short flight of stone steps, which led into a circular cave, lit from overhead, there being a narrow fissure in the rocks.

Had anyone noticed Dandy Jack, they would have seen that he had marked at intervals upon the rocky wall with a piece of red chalk, several crosses with an occasional arrow, showing the direction he had gone.

Texas Jim did not see these marks, the purpose of which we will explain later on, and when he reached the further end of the circular cave, lighted a torch preparatory to entering a second passage, longer and darker than the first.

At the end of it he suddenly conducted his companion into a large, rock-built chamber lighted by a number of flaming torches, where a most singular sight was witnessed.

Here were to be seen all the appliances for making counterfeit money of every description, and at that moment some score of men were engaged in the nefarious business.

Over there an engraver was bending over a small table, his eyes shaded from a powerful light which shone directly upon his work, while with deft fingers he handled the delicate tools of his craft, and inspected every line with a magnifying glass.

Yonder were a number of men running a press, and further on a man inspected the sheets as they were placed before him, crumpling them to give the appearance of long usage, and otherwise manipulating them in order that they should the better deceive the unwary.

Here were men working in metal, stamping, milling and weighing the coins, while others were wrapping them up in rolls and putting them away in boxes.

Every man was busy, and there were not many who had the hardened look of criminals, some of them looking as nearly like the honest artisan as was possible, and no doubt they would have been taken for such.

There were some indeed whom no one would have trusted outside of a prison wall, their faces being more than enough to condemn them, but these were in the minority.

"By hookey, you've got the thing down fine!" said Dandy Jack. "I'd never've thunked ye could git everythin' ye wanted up yer in the mountains."

"Nobody'd suspect us, d'ye see, and we kin work wi'out bein' disturbed. I kin ship the stuff east right from Denver, an' never be suspected. Why, man, there's a lot of express packages goin' out'n thar to-morrer mornin' consigned to parties in Omaha an' St. Louis, supposed to be specimens o' ore. They's just enough ore in 'em to make 'em heavy, an' the rest is green notes an' bogus coin."

"Not a bad dodge that, by the Big Bear," said Dandy Jack, admiringly.

"You kin bet it ain't. The way bills is all hunky, an' there ain't the least bit o' suspicion that the stuff ain't wot we says it is. Why, man, we've sent thousands o' dollars wuth o' the 'bogus' over the Union Pacific, an' no one any the wiser."

"The devil you have?"

"Yes. Say, old pard, lemme see them plates, will yer?"

"To be sure;" and Dandy Jack laid a package upon a table in the middle of the room, near which they were standing.

Jim untied it, and, sure enough, he found half-a-dozen or more counterfeit plates, all finely executed, evidently by a first-class engraver.

"By gosh!" said Jim, "them's putty, but I don't know much about sech things. Here, Pat Mitchell," addressing the engraver, "come over here."

The man came to where Jim was and pronounced the plates first-class, and at the next moment a most startling incident occurred.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW JACK LOST THE TRAIL.

LET us return to Handsome Jack Travis, as it is necessary to follow up his movements a little before we state what happened further in the counterfeiters' cave.

Larry the Wolf remained in the parlor for an hour after Dan had left, and was evidently playing a sharp game, as far as Jack could tell.

Texas Jim was not about, and the Wolf continued to smell blood to his heart's content.

At last he got up and went out, followed by Jack, who threw aside his disguise when he got out doors.

It had stopped snowing, but the wind still whistled and howled, cutting to the bone, and no one would care to be out unless he was obliged to be.

The Wolf wrapped a heavy fox-skin overcoat about him, and drawing a huge fur cap over his eyes and ears, started off on a jog trot down the principal street, Jack following close behind.

Presently he dodged into a drinking saloon which was still open—indeed, it never made any pretence of being shut—where he found Texas Jim and a man called Little Frank, who had once narrowly escaped death at the hands of Denver Dan's men.

"How dces the land lay, Larry?" asked Jim.

"Putty bully. Dan is about. Arizona got wiped out, an' his wife came in arter him—or at least Dan fotched her in, an' I thought they was goin' to have a fuss."

"We've fooled Dan this time, an' no mistake," said

Frank. "He ain't got no notion o' what we're doin', an' if he tries ter interfere wi' us, he'll get his head in a sling."

"He kin smell mischief a long way ahead," said Larry, "but I kin smell blood when he's around, and it don't smell good fur a cent. What yer goin' ter do next?"

"I've got ter go to ther den an' see 'bout gettin' rid o' a lot o' stuff. Ye'd better foller along easy, you an' Frank, 'cause I'll want ye brumby."

"All serene, my Texan friend," answered the Wolf, "we'll be thar;" and then, as Jim went out he turned to Frank and said:

"What's yer favorite p'ison to-night?"

"Gin and sugar."

Jack, who pretended to be dozing over a glass of grog off in one corner, had heard all the men said, and determined to follow them, having no doubt that the den referred to was the place where the counterfeiting was going on.

It was almost an hour before the two men left the place, and then Larry strolled into another saloon in about fifteen minutes after he had struck the street, leaving his companion to go it alone.

"It's all the same whether I follow one or the other, as they're both going to the same place," thought Jack, and so he shadowed Frank, keeping him in sight until he had left the city and struck off into the mountains.

The man left a plain trail behind him, and Jack had no difficulty in following it, though Frank was not always in sight.

At last, when the sun was about an hour high, and the snow began to melt, it became more difficult, although Jack had some idea where the man was going.

Suddenly there was the sound of pistol shots ahead of him, and Jack dashed forward in time to see the ruffian cut down by a man on horseback, the others—there being several in the party—immediately taking the body and hanging it to the branch of a dead tree not far away.

Jack blew a blast upon a silver whistle which he carried, and in a moment the men were at his side.

"Ah, Mike, you've got the boys out this morning, have you?" said Jack, Holcraft being at the head of the party.

"Begorrah, I have, an' it's fine sport we're havin'. Sure I swore I'd hang Little Frank on sight an' I done it, an' it's more'n a year since I've seen him."

"I'm sorry you did it, Mike."

"Sorry that I hung a murdherin' thief, that's tried to kill us all, an' that's been road agent and everything else bad?"

"Yes."

"It's not goin' back on Denver Dan ye are?"

"No; but it would have been better for our plans if you'd have let this fellow go for awhile."

"How's that?"

Jack whispered to him alone the plans which he and Dan had formed of getting rid of the counterfeiters; after they should have discovered the hiding-place of the gang.

"And, begob, I've put my fut in it!" said Mike. "Faix, I'm sorry for that, but maybe I kin lay fur Larry the Wolf."

"He'll smell blood if he sees you, for he knows you by

sight and he don't know me. No, I'd better go right back. They'll want you at the council this afternoon."

"All right, my handsome lad, I'm off like a shot from a cannon."

The party separated, Jack advising Holcraft to cut the body of the outlaw down so that his companions might not be alarmed and strike for new quarters, and when this had been done, Jack borrowed a horse from one of the band and set off for the city.

He did not meet the Wolf nor did he find him in the city, so he was forced to come to the dismal conclusion that the man had taken another route to the Den, and in this manner had caused his pursuer to lose the trail.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ANNOYING ACCUSATION AND A DELAY.

JACK being not far from his father's house at that time, concluded to go there before he did anything else, particularly as the secret council of the inner circle, held in an apartment behind the store, unknown to any but the mystic band, would take place in a short time.

He accordingly turned his steps thither, and met his father in the store, no one being present at the time.

"By the way, Jack," said Ned, after a few minutes' conversation, "have you got a hundred dollars you can spare me? Old Moses the Jew will be coming for his quarterly payment of the mortgage, and I don't like to disappoint him."

"No, it wouldn't do, because he might make trouble; that sort of men have no conscience."

"I haven't got quite enough, so if you will let me have it, I will pay you in a few days."

"Is this the last payment?"

"No, there's another yet; but that isn't much."

"I'm in a hurry now, dad, but you'll find all you want up stairs in my old trousers. Take all you want."

"All right. I suppose we might as well settle the whole thing up at once, and not have him coming around here any more. I hate the very sight of him."

Jack departed, and not long afterward the Jew entered, and Ned, remembering what Jack had said, ran up stairs and took enough of the money to settle the whole business, counting in what he had himself.

The Jew was very much surprised at being offered the whole amount, but counting over the money to see that it was all right, noticing that some of the bills were marked, gave a receipt in full and took his departure.

* * * * *

The members of the inner circle were fastened in the secret chamber, Jack being seated in the chair, as, for some reason, Dan was not present.

"Our captain will not be here this morning," said the young man, "for certain good reasons," and then he proceeded to state what they were, and to give the details of a certain plan which we prefer to keep a mystery for the present.

The session was a long and very interesting one, and the most complete details were made for carrying out Dan's scheme, which promised to create a genuine surprise.

At last, when the hour of noon had been long passed,

the assembly broke up, the men leaving by several secret passages so as not to excite suspicion.

Soon afterward Jack was riding leisurely along the road leading to the city when he saw two men approaching him on horseback.

He at once recognized them as United States marshals.

"Your name is John Travis, I believe?" said the foremost, as they rode up.

"Yes, usually called Jack. Do you want to see me?"

"You are our prisoner, Mr. John Travis, usually called Jack," said the man, with a poor attempt at satire.

"Indeed! Upon what charge am I arrested?"

"It will be time enough to ask that when we get you in jail. Understand, once for all, that resistance will be in vain. We have arms, and will not hesitate to use them upon the slightest provocation."

"You're a fool!" said Jack, coolly. "I have made no effort at resistance yet, nor did I intend to. You need not imagine, however, that you can intimidate me, for you can't."

"Will you come along quietly with us, or shall we have to use force?" blustered the man.

"How long have you been a marshal?"

"What's that to you? None of your impudence, but come along at once, or we'll drag you."

"Perhaps you don't know that I'm a deputy sheriff," said Jack, quietly. "I know you, and can tell you how long you have been a marshal. Just three days, and this is your first arrest. Authority seems to have turned what little brain you have."

"This is an insult, sir."

"Perhaps it is; at any rate, it is the truth. Now, sir," continued Jack, turning to the other man, "perhaps you will tell me what this charge is. You are aware, I believe, that I am not one of the criminal classes?"

"The charge is uttering, or, rather, passing counterfeit money—bank notes."

"Aha! Who makes the charge?"

"Isaac Moses."

"Aha! I see. Confound it, this is a bad business."

"You will find it so, indeed," said the first speaker, insolently. "Now I hope you are satisfied."

"Hold your tongue. I see how it was; I forgot to tell father about that bad stuff, and he gave it to Moses. How much was there that was bad?"

"Ninety dollars, and every one of the bills was marked."

"To be sure, and I can show you a hundred more just like them, if you will go back with me."

"So-ho! Then you confess to having spurious money in your possession?" said the first man, with a sneer.

Jack was strongly tempted to knock him down, but restraining himself, replied:

"Yes, and I can account for it. Does it strike you that a man wishing to pass bad money would be so foolish as to put his mark upon it in large, plain characters?"

"It would certainly be a foolish proceeding," said the man. "However, our orders are to take you before the Board, and if you can prove your innocence, which I do not doubt, you will be released."

"Hum, I ain't so sure of that," said the first marshal, in an insolent tone.

"I did not ask you for an opinion," returned Jack, hotly, "and I do not want one. I will go with you," he continued, addressing the other man, "but we must hurry, for I have important business on hand," and Jack whispered a few words in the man's ear.

"The deuce you say?" exclaimed he; "then we must indeed hasten."

Putting spurs to his horse, he dashed at full speed toward the town, followed instantly by Jack, the insolent marshal being left far behind.

He did his best to catch up, found it useless, and he had the mortification to behold upon reaching the town the liberation of Jack Travis, the matter having been satisfactorily explained, and the scheming Jew having been perfectly satisfied.

"You don't bear me any malice, I hope, for taking you for a knave?" said the marshal, rather contemptuously, as Jack was riding away.

"Not at all; I never pay any attention to the ravings of idiots!"

The man bit his lip, and Jack, dashing off, muttered to himself:

"Now to put my plan in execution, and pray Heaven I am not too late!"

CHAPTER X.

WHAT FURTHER HAPPENED IN THE CAVE.

WE left Dandy Jack in the cave of the counterfeiters, just as a startling occurrence was about to take place.

In order not to leave our readers longer in doubt as to what this occurrence was, we will proceed at once to state its nature, and what followed.

The engraver had just pronounced the plates produced by the stranger to be excellent, when Larry the Wolf came rushing into the cave followed by another man, both being very much excited.

"I kin smell blood!" yelled Larry, at the top of his lungs. "That galoot ain't Dandy Jack, he's a fraud!"

"I'm Dandy Jack myself," added Larry's companion, "an' this yer cuss stole my name an' my plates, an' I on'y got away by the skin o' my teeth!"

Instantly there was a scene of wild confusion, all the counterfeiters rushing to the spot, and seizing whatever weapon came nearest to hand.

"Who is he?" shouted Jim.

"Durned if I know," said the Wolf, "though I'll bet it's that—"

"Behold me!" shouted the stranger, throwing off the full beard he had worn, and making a quick movement with his hands toward the upper part of his face.

There was a shout, and the villains closed in upon him, but with a quick spring he leaped upon the table, and whipping out two revolvers defied the howling crowd to take him if they dared.

"Denver Dan, or I'll be blowed!" said Texas Jim.

It was, indeed, that redoubtable hero that stood above them, the well-known half mask upon his face, and in each hand a gleaming revolver, in every chamber of which there was death.

"Come on, you villains! Denver Dan awaits you!"

There was a momentary pause, and then a dozen shots were fired at the brave fellow's head.

He had forestalled them, however, and the reports of his shots rang clear and sharp through the cavern, more than one man falling in his tracks, never to arise again of his own will.

Suddenly the place was plunged in almost total darkness, the light from the furnace being the only thing that served to dispel the gloom.

With unerring precision Dan had dashed every torch to the floor by his bullets, and still he continued to fire upon the crowd, evidently having a regular arsenal upon his person.

"He must not escape alive!" shrieked Jim. "Upon him now, every man! Lights, there, lights, and be quick about it!"

A score of hardened ruffians rushed up, aiming at the place where the outlaw's head was supposed to be, and in another moment the place was illuminated by a powerful light.

The door of the furnace was thrown open, torches gleamed in all directions, and the cavern was fairly dazzling in its brightness.

To the intense surprise of all, the table was found to have been overthrown, and not a trace of Denver Dan remained!

He had disappeared as suddenly and completely as if he had been swallowed up in the rocky walls or sunk bodily through the unyielding floor.

He was nowhere to be seen, and, whether alive or dead, there was no trace of him.

He had vanished!

Suddenly Larry the Wolf uttered a yell.

"By the big grizzly!" he said, "listen to that 'ere!"

The shrill whistle, now so well known, which was invariably the signal for assistance, was at that moment heard ringing through the cavern.

"He is here!" shouted Jim, pointing to an open trap in the center of the room, over which the table had been placed, and which, bottom upward as it had been after Dan's sudden disappearance, had concealed the opening.

Jim knew of the trap-door, which covered a natural descent into another cave below the main one, and bethought himself at once that Dan had known and made use of it.

One second sufficed to drag the table away, and the yawning chasm was disclosed.

A bullet whizzed up from this hole, and Jim jumped aside as the hair on the top of his head was cut by the missile, which narrowly missed burying itself in the miscreant's brain.

The whistle again sounded, and Denver Dan himself sprang up through the trap, a dozen pistols being fired at him upon the instant.

He staggered a little, but did not fall, and having drawn the fire of his enemies, he rushed upon them, shooting right and left, while at the same time form after form, all masked like himself, swarmed up through the trap, and joined their forces with his.

"Make tracks—every man!" yelled Jim. "We are betrayed!"

Dan, Joe Darrel, Mike Holcraft and a dozen others threw themselves upon the outlaws, who fled precipitately to the outer cavern.

Here another surprise awaited them, and a terrible one it was, too.

The rude shanty which covered the entrance to the cave was in flames, and as some of the most hardy and reckless of the villains dashed through the fire, they were met by Jack Travis, Sam Horton, Jerry Dunn and a score or more of the vigilantes, who poured a most destructive fire upon them.

They were not provided with coats of mail like Dan, that being the secret of his wonderful escape from death, and were shot down like sheep.

Texas Jim made a most determined defense, and saluting his old enemy, Sam Horton, grappled with him, and forced him away from his friends, who had followed up the flank movement, and rushed into the cavern as soon as the wretched shanty had fallen to the ground.

Those who knew of other means of escape besides the regular passages, took that way of getting out of their trouble, but by far the greater part of the outlaws were either slain or captured, the fight being most terrible, and the fiercest which Denver Dan and his men had ever been in, though they were by no means unused to scenes of bloodshed.

CHAPTER XI.

SAM HORTON LEAVES THE MYSTIC BAND.

WHILE the fight was going on in the cavern, Sam Horton and Texas Jim had reached a place in the road where a high rock overhung the pass.

They grappled and clinched, each man striving to get the advantage; and both being nearly evenly matched, the struggle seemed likely to be a long and desperate one.

To and fro they reeled, now getting so near the edge that it seemed as if both must be dashed headlong over, and now forcing each other against the wall of rock behind them.

Both had knives in their hands at the beginning of the fight, but Jim had dropped his by accident, and was trying with all his might to get Sam's away from him, or at least to prevent his using it.

At last the outlaw succeeded in grasping the handle of the knife, but at the very moment that it was wrenched from Sam's hand, he tripped Jim's heel, and both fell to the ground.

The knife flew out of the villain's grasp, and rattled among the rocks far below, thus putting both men upon an equal footing.

They rolled over and over, each trying to force the other from the edge, each endeavoring to grasp the other's throat and choke him into submission.

And thus the struggle continued, the friends of each being far away, or too busy to come to their assistance, or not knowing about the fight.

Dan had learned from the woman the secret of the counterfeitors' cave, as her husband had been one of the gang, and had been trusted as much by the leader as the Wolf himself.

The whole secret of the cave and its situation, its secret

entrances, and the passwords necessary to gain admission, had been told to Dan, together with the names of every man connected with the nefarious business, and the exact amount of money under manufacture.

Besides that, the man called Dandy Jack was at that moment in the house lately occupied by Hank, and thither Dan went at once, and succeeded in capturing him, and taking away his plates, procured a false head just like the real one worn by the Virginian, simulating his appearance exactly.

It was the plan of breaking in upon the counterfeitors which had been discussed in the secret council, and the placing of a large party of vigilantes in the lower cave and outside the cabin, was the work which the men of the inner circle had been engaged upon after the breaking up of the meeting.

The signal had been agreed upon, and everything was in readiness for the attack, which would not have taken place so suddenly but for an unforeseen circumstance.

Dandy Jack had succeeded in getting away, and going at once to the cavern, had very much astonished the Wolf by giving the password, and announcing his name and business.

Larry was thunderstruck, and knew at once that something must be the matter, in consequence of which thought he rushed at once into the inner cavern and gave the alarm.

Jack Travis, who had been delayed by the false charge of the Jew, had ridden faster than he had ever ridden before, and had made up nearly all the lost time, and, indeed, would have been ahead of time had it not been for the sudden and unlooked-for disclosure of Dan's identity.

As it was, he was just in time to head one party of the vigilantes, and it was under his direction that the house had been fired.

As we have seen, the slaughter was terrific; the loss to Dan's men being considerable by reason of the frightful nature of the conflict, which was indeed most fierce and bloody.

But few of the ruffians escaped, and at last both flanks of the Mystic Band met in the central cavern, Jack's party being guided by the red crosses which Dan had made.

The plates were at once destroyed, being smashed in pieces and thrown into the furnace, together with the spurious coin.

The stamps, presses and other apparatus were broken up and burned, and then Dan, who determined that nothing should remain to tell of the whereabouts of the counterfeitors, or to afford them a retreat, signified his intention of blowing the place up, several kegs of gunpowder having been discovered in one of the smaller caverns.

Preparations were at once made, and when all was ready, a fuse was prepared which would burn for twenty minutes, and when it was lighted, the vigilantes hurried from the place, carrying their prisoners with them.

While all this was going on, the terrible struggle between the two men, the outlaw and the vigilante, had been going on with unabated fury.

Both had struggled to their feet, and then the aim was to draw their pistols, each man being thus provided.

Each seemed to apprehend the other's intention, and

they held on to each other with a deadly grip, striving at one and the same moment to secure their own weapon and prevent the other from getting his.

At last Sam succeeded by a tremendous and almost superhuman effort in getting free from the outlaw's grasp.

Springing back a pace or two, he drew his revolver with the quickness of a lightning flash and fired.

Texas Jim, equally swift, had drawn his own weapon, and for a few moments the bullets flew thick and fast, both men being hit more than once.

"Time!" shouted Jim, throwing down his useless weapon.

"Do you give in?" asked Sam.

"Yes. Don't shoot; I give up. Time!"

"All right," and Sam unsuspectingly lowered his weapon, and advanced toward Jim with the intention of disarming and carrying him back to the cavern.

With a treachery worthy of a savage, the villain drew a small single barreled pistol from the bosom of his rough shirt and fired, the bullet striking Sam square in the forehead.

He fell to the ground without a groan, and expired in a moment, the bullet having penetrated the brain and caused instant death.

Texas Jim, gazing for a moment at the dead body of the man he had so foully murdered, gave it a contemptuous kick, and then darted down the mountain side at a quick pace, being soon lost to sight.

Poor Sam's body was found by his sorrowing companions, and Dan swore a great oath to be revenged upon the villain who had thus killed his old chum, for he knew that it must have been through treachery that Sam had met his death.

Bearing the lifeless body, the party hurried down the mountain, and before long a dull, booming sound told them that the retreat of the counterfeiters was no more.

CHAPTER XII.

TEXAS JIM HEARS A FAMILIAR VOICE.

THE haunt of the counterfeiters was destroyed, the gang broken up and dispersed, their accomplices imprisoned, and nearly every man put out of the way of doing any more mischief for some time.

The months had passed by rapidly, and it was now midwinter, and in all this time not a sign of Texas Jack could be seen.

It was clear that he did not care to remain in the neighborhood after what had happened, or else he had so carefully hid himself that the utmost amount of searching availed nothing.

Larry the Wolf had also escaped, though with his usual luck he had left part of himself behind him, to wit, his left eye, besides getting a bad cut down the left side of his face, which would leave a scar as long as he lived.

He had been seen about six weeks after the affair in the mountains, and was recognized despite his altered appearance.

The circumstance that really led to his being discovered, was the following:

He had remarked casually to a man with whom he was

sitting drinking and playing euchre in Flaxman's parlor, that he could smell blood, and he didn't think it healthy for him to stay around there any longer.

One of the band of vigilantes heard this characteristic remark, and upon gazing at the speaker a second time recognized Larry, though he had not done so before.

"You're there, are you, Mr. Wolf?" said the man, springing to his feet and seizing the desperado by the throat.

Larry's companions smelling trouble, if not blood also, quietly decamped, leaving the outlaw to his fate.

"You're wanted for that last game of yours," said the man, "counterfeiting and passing bad money. Be easy, now," for Larry was struggling desperately, "or I'll have to make a hole in you!"

Larry evidently objected strongly to this proceeding, and rolled to the floor, dragging his would-be captor with him.

He managed to roll on top, and then suddenly striking the other a blow in the face which for a moment stunned him, arose hastily to his feet, jumped clear through the window, taking the sash with him, and was off before the alarm could be raised, or the vigilante recover from his daze.

After that nothing more was seen of the rascal, though search was made high and low for him.

Nobody missed him, however, and Dan did not care whether he lived or not, as long as he kept out of the way.

He was determined to avenge the death of Horton, whom, next to Jack, he loved better than any man in the band, and his search for Texas Jim was unceasing.

The poor woman, whose husband had been killed at Flaxman's that stormy night, did not long survive the privations she had suffered, and particularly the exposure for hours in the bitter cold that same fearful night.

Within a month she passed away, and was buried at Dan's expense in a quiet corner of the churchyard.

There were few mourners; but that mattered not. The poor woman had suffered bitterly, and it was not in Dan's nature to deny her a decent burial, whatever her faults had been.

The winter had been an unusually severe one, and Dan —known in the city as plain Mr. Fleming, and never once suspected of being the redoubtable leader of the vigilantes —had little to do besides keeping his house warm and his cattle from freezing to death, crime seeming to be at a standstill during such frightful weather.

One day in midwinter he was sitting in Ned Travis's store, when a man came in and asked for a quart of rum.

"I don't sell it," said Travis. "I haven't any license."

"Do you keep any?"

"A little, for my own use."

"Can't you sell me some, then?"

"No."

"Oh, you needn't be scared, I ain't one o' yer detective chaps what teases a feller ter sell him a drink and then gives him away. I ain't one o' that sort."

"You can get all the liquor you want about a mile from here," said Dan, looking up.

The man started at the sound of his voice and looked him full in the face.

Dan started himself when he saw the man's face, having recognized something familiar in his voice when he had first spoken, and he now arose to his feet.

"Don't be in a hurry," he said. "I don't mind if I go with you myself to show you the way, and have a drink at the same time."

"Thankee, I can't wait," answered the other, as he made a bolt for the door. "Good mornin', Mr. Denver Dan. I didn't know your face, 'cause I never saw it before, but your voice give ye away bad."

"By Jove, he mustn't get away," said Dan, springing for his coat, which hung on a peg, and in which was his revolver.

"Who is it, Dan?" asked Travis, as Dan seized his weapon and ran to the door.

The answer was a half-dozen shots fired in quick succession, and then Dan rushed in, drew on a pair of heavy boots, jumped into a short but thick coat, and pulling a fur cap down over his ears, stuck another revolver in his pocket and made for the door, saying to himself:

"I'll follow his tracks if they lead to the very heart of the mountain."

"Who is it, Dan?" asked Ned again.

"Texas Jim, and I'm after him to avenge the death of Sam Horton. Tell Jack to follow."

CHAPTER XIII.

HANDSOME JACK HEARS NEWS AND MEETS WITH AN ACCIDENT.

THAT same wintry afternoon, Jack Travis was sitting in a store in Denver, having gone thither on business for his father, and having finished it was quietly smoking a pipe previous to his departure for home, when a man entered and beckoned to him.

The man was young Dunn, a member of the inner circle.

Jack arose at once and went over to him.

"What's up?" he asked, quickly, seeing by the man's manner that something important was coming.

"Texas Jim is about," was the answer. "He was seen just now, passing through the town."

"Is that so? Dan must be told of it at once."

"Indade he must, then," said the young Irishman, "fur no mon but the captain must have the vengeance on him, fur murdherin' poor Sam."

"Who saw him?" asked Jack, buttoning up his coat and drawing his fur cap more tightly on his head.

"Joe Darrel did, sor, an' sure he war going to pop him, whin I tould him he musn't take the job out av the captain's hands."

"Did Jim see you?"

"Divil mind him, no, fur we leapt behint a fence; but I belieave he wint towarrads yer fayther's house."

"Good; then Dan may seek the villain."

"I'm of that opinion mesilf intirely, Masther Jack, fur he war goin' fur the lift handed road whin I lost sight o' th' omadhawn, bad luck tur his dhrifty mug."

"I must make sure of it," said Jack, taking his whip and going out to the stable.

"Is it goin' in the sleigh ye are?" asked Dunn.

"Yes; will you get in?"

"No, I thank ye; I have other business. Begorrah, I hope ye'll overhaul the vagabond an' put a pound av bullets in his ugly hide."

"I hope so, too, my lad."

Jack sprang into the sleigh and drove off at full speed, the snow from the horse's hoofs flying thick and fast around him.

When about a third of the way had been passed, the horse stepped into a hole covered over by a thin sheet of ice and stumbled.

Jack tried to rein him in, but the poor beast fell all in a heap and broke one of the shafts of the sleigh.

The young man jumped out, and running to the horse's head, lifted him upon his feet.

Fortunately he was not badly hurt, no bones being broken, though his right foreleg was lamed somewhat.

Jack at once set about mending the damaged shaft, having a bit of rope in the bottom of the sleigh.

It took some time to do this, and as he dared not drive his horse too fast for fear of increasing his lameness, he did not arrive at his father's until some time after he had expected.

He drove under the shed immediately, and attended to the animal's wants, having in the meantime led him into the stable, and then after making him comfortable ran into the house.

"Where's Dan, father?" he asked, in an excited manner.

"Gone out."

"How long ago?"

"About fifteen minutes."

"When is he coming back?"

"I can't say."

"That's too bad. I've news for him."

"What is it?"

"Texas Jim is about."

"I know it."

"The deuce you do!"

"Yes; he was in here."

"Texas Jim in here?"

"Exactly."

"Did Dan know it?"

"Yes; he followed him out."

"Did he catch him?"

"I can't tell. He fired at him several times."

"By George! I thought I heard shots just before I got here."

"He wants you to follow him."

"Where did he go?"

"I can't tell; you didn't see him?"

"No."

"Then he must have gone the other way. You'll see his tracks in the snow, I guess."

"Was the villain armed?"

"Not that I could see. He was mighty scared when he spied Dan, and got up and dusted out of sight quicker'n old boots."

"Was Dan armed?"

"Yes."

"Then he'll pepper him as sure as guns. I must be off and see the fun."

"All right; I'll wait for you."

Jack shot out of the house, and soon espying the tracks in the snow, followed them as rapidly as possible, trusting that he would shortly come up with the two men.

The tracks wound about and became confused, finally leading down in the direction of the river, one of the smaller forks of the White.

For ten minutes more did Jack follow the trail, coming at last to the river bank, where, in mid stream, struggling among the cakes of floating ice, he beheld Texas Jim and his firm friend and leader, Denver Dan!"

CHAPTER XIV.

DENVER DAN PAYS OFF AN OLD SCORE.

DAN rushed out of the house, seeing nothing of his enemy, but the tracks in the snow were plain enough, and he followed for some distance.

Then, presently, he saw Jim ahead of him, though the latter did not know he was being followed.

Dan fired a shot, but the distance was too great for it to be effective, and the bullet fell short of its mark.

The shot had attracted Jim's attention, however, and he turned at the sound, and seeing Dan behind him, retraced his steps for a few moments, and then suddenly turned and ran toward the mountains.

Dan rapidly overtook him and fired again, this time the bullet striking him in the shoulder.

He sank upon the snow, and then seeing that Dan was aiming to head him off, struck a bee line for the river bank, intending to cross over on the ice and stow away in the house of old chum, half hunter, half horse-thief.

The air was cold and piercing, but the vigorous exercise had warmed Dan's blood, so that he was in a perfect glow, and thought no more of the cold than if it had been a balmy spring morning.

He ran like a deer and soon overhauled Jim, who turned upon him desperately and fired, the bullet going wide of its mark.

He seemed to know that his last hour had come, and it would be useless to attempt to escape, and even the defiance of despair seemed to be wanting.

It was as if he knew he must die, and that resistance could do him no good nor any one else harm.

He fired two or three shots at Dan, one penetrating his hat, and then threw down his weapon and drew a knife.

He was standing on the river bank, and Dan seeing him thus, put away his pistol and drawing a knife, said:

"You don't deserve to have a chance for your life, Jim, and I ought to shoot you down like a mad dog; but Denver Dan has always done the square thing and I'll do it now and give you an even chance."

He then sprang upon Jim and a desperate fight ensued.

The blows flew thick and fast, the keen knives glistening and flashing in the lessening light, and throwing off sparks as they clashed together.

Dan had received a few slight cuts and Jim several bad ones, though he still fought with desperation, when suddenly the blade of Dan's knife snapped short off at the hasp.

Texas Jim saw the accident, and in an instant his eyes lit with demoniac fury as he rushed upon Dan and dealt him a terrible blow, which, had it struck its intended mark, would have finished Dan's career then and there.

Dan caught the blow upon the hasp of his knife, however, and then seizing Jim in his powerful grasp, hurled him over backwards.

He had not noticed that the bank at this place made a sudden decline towards the water, and instead of falling where he stood as he expected to, he and Jim rolled down with great rapidity and struck the ice with considerable force.

Dan was uppermost, and when he at last came to a stop he seized Jim by the throat and tightened his grip.

The man struggled and kicked, and made a frightful amount of resistance, which soon produced a strange result.

The ice was not so strong as it looked, and in this place it was particularly thin, and suddenly, without any previous warning, it gave a tremendous crack, which sounded like the report of a pistol, and broke all across.

The water rushed up and broke the ice into cakes, among which the two desperate men were struggling in a moment.

The water was icy cold, and struck a deathly chill to the heart, but Dan thought nothing of this, and as he and Jim arose to the surface after the first plunge, he seized the villain again by the throat and forced his head under water where he held it until he heard a shout.

Looking up, he saw Jack Travis standing on the bank looking at the struggle.

"Do you want any help, Dan?" shouted Jack.

"No; I am all—Yes—yes, lad, come quick; I am getting a cramp; hurry!"

He released Jim from his grasp, and the man instantly sank out of sight and did not appear again.

Jack ran down upon the ice, and standing upon the stronger edges, managed, after some trouble, to get Dan upon the bank.

"Where is Jim?" was his first inquiry.

"I think he went under the ice; at all events he has not yet come up again; and he can't be alive."

"Then I don't know whether I killed him or not," said Dan. "If I didn't I meant to, so it's all the same, I suppose."

"Don't stand here shivering," said Jack, seizing Dan by the arm; "you must get out of here if you don't want to freeze to death!"

Jack ran Dan at the top of his speed back to the house, after which the man was put to bed, and soon fell into sound sleep.

No bad results followed the exposure, as he was a man of iron constitution, and had long been used to the rougher kind of life. Had it been otherwise he would have doubtless taken a cold, which would have killed him.

When the ice finally broke up in the spring the remains of Texas Jim were found under the ice some five miles below the spot where the terrific struggle had taken place.

There was nothing left of it but the skeleton the fishes having eaten away all the flesh, but it was easily identified,

and as Texas Jim had not been seen since there was no doubt that he was dead.

Certain little things upon the remains were known to be Jim's, his cartridge box, tobacco case, and one or two other articles, and so it was settled that at last he was dead, and would no longer trouble honest people.

His bones were buried without anything to mark the spot, and then Dan said to himself:

"The old score is paid off at last, and poor Sam is avenged."

Larry the Wolf had disappeared entirely, and people soon forgot him in their daily round of duties and cares.

The counterfeitors had all been punished, and their

trade broken up, for which Dan received the thanks of the community.

Dan's life after that was by no means an idle or uneventful one, and many were the hot fights, sharp schemes, fine pieces of keen detective work, and frightful dangers which he went through in after years.

For the present, however, we cannot describe all these remarkable adventures, through at some future date we have no doubt that we will again introduce the hero and his companions to our readers, and give in detail the wonderful escapes and daring rescues of the renowned vigilante.

[THE END.]

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